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ABSTRACT

This report highlights input provided in 1994 at forums in seven Ohio communities for a statewide plan for a school-to-work system in Ohio. Comments were given by 1,100 business persons, community leaders, educators, labor unions, and parents in Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Marietta, Toledo, and Wilmington. Overall response to a school-to-work system was positive, with the need to ensure cooperation with and outreach to existing programs that serve similar functions cited as the top priority. Comments from each of the constituent groups included the following: (1) business representatives said students have not mastered basic skills necessary to function at work and that teachers need experience in real-world work; (2) community leaders advocated getting all groups to work together to coordinate activities, enhancing teacher training, and elevating the skills of students; (3) educators recognized a need for additional training for teachers and counselors; they wanted the state to provide a concise definition of the school-to-work system and they wanted parents involved in it; (4) labor unions expressed strong displeasure with the skill level of many high school students in mathematics and English and with students' weak work ethic; and (5) parents expressed a need for communication about the system to help increase their understanding about the options available to students. Differences in responses among the regions were minor, except that groups in Toledo were most concerned about students' basic skills. (The report contains summaries of audience comments by constituent group and by location.) (KC)

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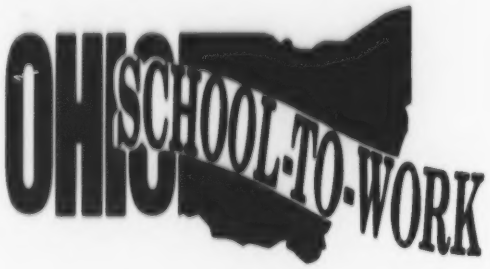
Community Response to Ohio's School-to-Work Vision

Comments and Ideas Received During Seven Regional School-to-Work Forums Held in Ohio in June 1994



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George V. Voinovich
Governor

OHIO SCHOOL-TO-WORK

Mary A. McCullough
Director

August 2, 1994

As one of several School-to-Work outreach activities, this report, *Community Response to Ohio's School-to-Work Vision*, highlights input provided by seven Ohio communities for a statewide plan for a School-to-Work system in Ohio. The tremendous local response provided by business, community leaders, educators, organized labor and parents signifies the *beginning* of collaboration and coordination among the many groups interested in Ohio's School-to-Work efforts. Continuing to use the wealth and experience of Ohio's existing worker training resources, both public and private, are key in developing a truly comprehensive statewide School-to-Work system.

While forum participation was successful, we know there are many groups yet untapped that have valuable input for Ohio's School-to-Work system. Additional opportunities for input, which are forthcoming, will enhance the overall vision and further clarify the practical aspects of School-to-Work implementation.

The combined efforts of the Ohio General Assembly's Investing in People Project and the Governor's Human Resources Investment Council in building a vision for Ohio's School-to-Work system will be reflected in a report to the legislature and the governor on October 1, 1994. While this report will contain points of action and recommendations for legislation in support of School-to-Work, its strength will be reflected in the process established for continued communication among all parties interested in Ohio's School-to-Work system. In this light, please pass this report on to others to help enhance the awareness of Ohio's School-to-Work activities.

For additional copies of this report or questions about School-to-Work in Ohio, please contact Mary McCullough, School-to-Work Director, at (614) 728-4630.

Linda Furney

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Findings

To begin establishing Ohio's School-to-Work system, seven regional forums were held in June 1994 to gain community input and cooperation on a proposed School-to-Work vision. The input gained from the 1,100 Ohioans participating in the forums will be used in shaping future recommendations on this initiative.

In tracking and analyzing responses from the seven regional forums, certain trends began to emerge. Statewide, respondents seemed to grasp and appreciate the value of the School-to-Work system. The universal concern was to ensure cooperation with and outreach to existing programs that serve similar functions. Among groups and regions, this was cited consistently as the top priority.

Business representatives ranked as the greatest challenge the statement that students have not mastered basic skills necessary to function in the workplace. They also indicated that teachers need experience in a real-world work environment.

Community leaders presented a balanced look at challenges and strategies. They advocated getting all groups to work together to coordinate activities, enhancing teacher training and elevating the skills of students.

Educators recognized a need for additional training for teachers and counselors. Their suggestions were not as industry-oriented as those cited by business and labor groups. Perhaps because of their anticipated role in executing the School-to-Work system, educators also expressed a strong desire for the state to provide a concise definition of the system with clearly defined parameters. The need for parent involvement was also mentioned on a regular basis by educators.

Labor groups expressed strong displeasure with the skill level of many high school students in basic areas such as mathematics and English. Various groups stated their perception that high school students have a weak work ethic. These groups also expressed concern about a perceived lack of understanding among educators about the real-world work environment.

Parents expressed a need for communication about the system to help increase understanding at home about the options available to students. They seemed to recognize that educators and workplace mentors may have different goals and they saw enhanced communication as a potential strategy.

Statewide Summary. Regionally, the differences in responses were minor. With the exception of Toledo, the groups in all cities cited the need for collaboration as the top priority. In Toledo, the lack of basic skills among students ranked first. Funding was included as a top priority in Akron and Cincinnati; groups in other areas expressed concerns about funding, but did not rank it as a top-three priority.

Introduction

The proposed vision for Ohio's School-to-Work system is:

Every student in Ohio will graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the ever-changing world of work.

Ohio's School-to-Work system includes the following elements:

- Paid work experience combined with guided learning opportunities provided by employers
- Integration of work-based and school-based academic and occupational learning
- Emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning

In July 1993, Ohio established 11 School-to-Work demonstration projects throughout the state. These pilot projects are designed to generate results that will assist in the development of Ohio's School-to-Work system.

Another part of the research to establish the state's School-to-Work system was a series of seven regional forums held in June 1994 to bring together various segments of Ohio communities. The purpose was to build local partnerships, foster local commitment and learn what is already happening. The forums were held in Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Marietta, Toledo and Wilmington.

Introduction

Representatives of business, labor, education, parents and community leadership were invited to attend the regional forums. They were asked to provide input on the following questions.

? *Based on your unique perspectives, what are the challenges to establishing School-to-Work initiatives in your community as outlined in the state's vision? List the negative forces for change.*

? *What are possible strategies to address those challenges? List the positive forces for change.*

? *What are the existing programs and organizations in your community that can support a local School-to-Work initiative? List the systems impacted by School-to-Work.*

Each group was assigned a moderator and asked to record responses to these questions on a flip chart. Individual participants were given colored stickers to convey the level of priority an individual would give an item. At the end of each meeting, participants applied the appropriate colored sticker to the initiatives representing the challenges and strategies they considered most important.

Most of the responses from community to community and from group to group could be clearly categorized into five themes.

The distinct themes that emerged are described as follows:

Challenges

- **Collaboration**
  Organizations must communicate effectively with each other. Existing programs must be carefully assessed to make the best use of resources and avoid duplication.
- **Students' Basic Skills/Work Ethic**
  Many students lack basic skills needed to function in the workplace and generally lack a strong work ethic.
- **Teacher Training, School System**
  Teachers need more exposure to the business world and school systems need to be revised to accommodate changing needs.
- **Funding**
  The education system currently lacks sufficient funding to support its activities.
- **Definition Of Program**
  School-to-Work and its operations need to be more clearly defined.

Strategies

- **Collaboration**
  Facilitating cooperation among all interested parties and integrating existing programs into the School-to-Work system will make efficient use of resources and avoid duplication.
- **Students' Basic Skills/Work Ethic**
  Raising school standards will help ensure that students have the basic skills necessary to benefit from workplace experience.
- **Teacher Training, School System**
  Providing teachers with advanced training and exposure to current worksite conditions will better prepare them to shepherd students through the system. Revamping the school structure can accommodate curriculum changes and students' work schedules.
- **Funding**
  Investigating and securing funding sources prior to implementation will help system building proceed more smoothly.
- **Business incentives**
  Offering financial incentives to businesses may encourage their participation.

Introduction

In the remainder of this report, the results of the forums have been summarized in two ways. The most distinct differences appeared between types of groups, rather than geographical boundaries. Therefore, the first half of this report contains summaries of the findings by audience. The differences detected between regions were minimal, but provide insight as to how local perceptions affect the view of the School-to-Work system. The second half of this report contains summaries of the responses by region.

Responses to the third question about which programs and groups would be most affected by the School-to-Work system were fairly consistent among groups and regions. These findings are summarized on page 19.

Business

Representatives of the business community met in all communities except Wilmington. They met separately in Akron, Toledo and Cleveland, with labor in Cincinnati, and as part of composite groups in Marietta and Dayton.

Like labor, business representatives frequently cited the substandard skills of students entering the work force. They consistently mentioned a lack of work ethic, low standards in schools and the inability of students to do simple tasks involving mathematics and language. The second most-mentioned need was lack of teacher training. Ranking third was the need to work together to enhance existing programs and form partnerships.

The overwhelming consensus on strategies was to begin with the schools and teachers. Suggestions included possible year-round education and helping educators understand the "real" job market. The second two priorities received equal emphasis among business representatives across the state: Improve minimum academic skills (cited most often in Cincinnati and Wilmington) and help groups work together (cited most often in Akron). A close fourth was providing economic incentives for businesses.

Challenges

- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Teachers need training and real world work experience*
- *Need for collaboration among groups*

Strategies

- *Teachers work industry jobs*
- *Involve all groups in working together*
- *Ensure students have basic skills before entering workplace*

Audience Report

Community Leaders

Community leaders held sessions in Akron, Toledo and Wilmington, and joined with parents in Cincinnati, Dayton and Cleveland. In Marietta, they joined a composite group.

Community leaders in all cities unanimously selected the need for collaboration as the top priority. The need for communication among groups was cited frequently. The second and third priorities received the same emphasis from the groups. A lack of basic skills and a weak work ethic among high school students were cited most frequently in Wilmington. A lack of educator experience in business and industry was ranked as a top challenge as well.

Most of the strategies focused on getting groups to work together. Specific suggestions included developing partnerships and establishing a clearinghouse. The second most popular strategy was to provide advanced training for teachers and support staff in business and technology. Community leaders also endorsed providing financial incentives to businesses for becoming involved in the School-to-Work system.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Need for teacher experience in workplace*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together*
- *Provide advanced training to teachers in technology and business*
- *Offer financial incentives to businesses*

Educators

Educators met individually in all cities except Marietta, where they were part of a composite group.

Educators overwhelmingly identified the need for collaboration among groups as a top priority. Concerns were expressed about "recreating the wheel" and eliminating duplication of programs. Educators were the only group to cite as a top priority the need to clearly define the School-to-Work system. They pleaded for a concise definition that clearly articulates expectations. The third need expressed was for additional preparation of teachers and staff. Funding was also mentioned frequently as a challenge.

Approximately one-third of the responses from educators related to the strategy of getting various groups to work together through consortia, advisory councils and the like. The second most popular strategy was to revamp teacher training and to restructure the school day to allow more flexibility. Thirdly, educators recognized the need for economic incentives such as tax breaks and a release from liability to encourage business participation.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Need clear, concise definition of system*
- *Additional staff and teacher preparation*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; build on existing programs*
- *Revamp teacher training and school day*
- *Create financial incentives for businesses*

Audience Report

Labor Unions

Representatives of labor unions in Cincinnati and Wilmington met with business representatives; in Akron, Cleveland and Toledo they met separately, and in Dayton and Marietta they were represented in composite groups.

Labor representatives cited the need for groups to work together as the primary concern. Another predominant theme, expressed most strongly in southwestern Ohio (Cincinnati and Wilmington), was a lack of basic skills in students. They cited the need for teachers to have more knowledge about the world of work and said that labor unions' apprenticeship training programs need to be accepted on an equal basis by educators. It is interesting to note that concerns about funding were minimal among the labor groups, with only two mentions among all sessions.

Establishing partnerships was listed most frequently as a strategy, with strategies for teacher training and education reform running a close second. Ideas included making job shadowing a requirement for teachers and implementing industry exchanges for teachers and counselors. In Cleveland, most talk of strategies focused on teacher training and school reform. The third most popular strategy for improving system success involved elevating student skills.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Teachers need real world experience; antiquated school system*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together*
- *Teachers work industry jobs*
- *Ensure students have basic skills before entering workplace*

Parents

Parents met separately in Toledo and Wilmington, met with community leaders in Cincinnati, Dayton and Cleveland, and met as part of a composite group in Marietta. They were not represented in Akron.

Parents perceived collaboration between groups and programs as the greatest challenge in building the School-to-Work system. They identified as the second priority the need to make the education community "more aware of what's happening in business." Funding ranked a distant third in terms of priorities with only two mentions among all groups in the state.

Parents across Ohio expressed ideas for advisory committees, stronger relationships among groups and assessment of existing programs as the top strategies. Improving the educational process by exposing teachers to more industry experience was the second priority strategy. The third priority statewide, and given top priority among parents in Toledo, was funding. Toledo's strategy was to "develop local programs regardless of state and federal money."

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Need for teacher experience in workplace*
- *Need for funding*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; build on existing programs*
- *Expose teachers to the business world*
- *Develop local programs regardless of funding*

Regional Report

Akron

The following groups met in Akron on June 9, 1994:

- Community leaders
- Business
- Educators
- Labor

The Akron groups were unified in identifying the top challenges and strategies. The primary concern was a need for collaboration among various groups impacted by and involved in the School-to-Work system. This need was cited seven times in the 27 challenges mentioned by the Akron groups, with each of the three groups placing top priority on that challenge. The groups also expressed concern that students' basic skills, such as mathematics and science skills, were substandard. Funding was the third concern.

The most popular strategy suggested by the Akron groups (five of 16 ideas) was to implement collaborative efforts. One specific idea was development of a clearinghouse. Other, more general suggestions related to creating a "central focus to bring together all efforts." The next priorities were to teach real-world concepts (such as providing houses to remodel) and to focus money on existing programs.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Determine source of funding for the system*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; create a clearinghouse*
- *Teach real-world concepts to students*
- *Focus money on existing programs*

Cincinnati

The following groups met in Cincinnati on June 21, 1994:

- Business/labor (met together)
- Community leaders/parents (met together)
- Educators
- Representatives of all groups

With the exception of educators (who said the greatest need was for a clear definition of the School-to-Work system), all groups cited collaboration as the greatest need. Second was that educators lack knowledge of how industry works, followed by "students lack skills, ambition, responsibility, pride and trustworthiness."

The overwhelming consensus on strategies was that of collaboration, with 21 of 54 suggestions mentioning ideas such as learning from existing programs and developing a clearinghouse, advisory councils, a consortium of affected parties and an electronic network bulletin board. The next most popular strategies were teacher training, such as career days and job shadowing, and year-round school. While not cited frequently as a need, the third strategy was to provide financial incentives to encourage involvement of business.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Need to train teachers and revise school system to make learning relevant to business*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together*
- *Revamp teacher training; consider year-round school*
- *Create incentives for businesses to become involved*

Cleveland

The following groups met in Cleveland on June 28, 1994:

- Business
- Educators
- Labor
- Parents/community leaders (met together)

While the top priority cited in Cleveland, as it was in most other communities, was the need for collaboration, there was a strong sentiment evident in many comments that the present structure and philosophies of the school system are not conducive to the success of the School-to-Work system. Many comments reflected the thought that there is a "negative attitude toward non-college prep programs." This sentiment was strongest in the labor group, but was also evident in the others.

As expected from the concerns expressed about the school system, changes in teacher training and curricula were cited often as strategies. The top strategies, however, were to involve all parties and strengthen existing programs.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Need to revamp school structure and philosophies*
- *Determine source of funding for the system*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together*
- *Revise curriculum; require real-world experience for teachers*
- *Create incentives for businesses to become involved*

Dayton

The following groups met in Dayton on June 20, 1994:

- Business
- Educators
- Parents/community leaders (met together)
- Representatives of all groups

The need for collaboration of groups involved in and affected by the School-to-Work system was the primary challenge cited in the Dayton meetings. Another challenge strongly emphasized in Dayton was that students are not academically prepared to function in a work environment. They also cited concerns about funding for the system.

Reflecting the need most often cited, the top strategy was to get all groups to work together. The second most popular strategy was to provide training about careers for teachers and get them more involved in the career-planning process. One suggestion was to organize the school day differently to create more flexibility. Dayton participants also offered strategies to elevate skill levels among students, specifically recruiting tutors and changing the school culture to recognize a strong work ethic.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Determine sources of funding for the system*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; enhance communication*
- *Train teachers about careers; use school day differently*
- *Ensure students have basic skills before entering workplace*

Marietta

All audiences met together in Marietta on June 16, 1994.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Students lack basic skills*
- *Determine source of funding for the system*

Marietta participants cited the need to assess existing programs to determine if they are meeting existing needs and to identify how industry, business and unions can get involved. They also expressed concern that "students are not coming out of high school with foundations now." They specifically cited basic skills such as mathematics and English as needing improvement. Funding was also a frequently cited need. In fact, based on the tone of the comments, frustration with funding seemed to be more predominant in Marietta than the other cities. Marietta participants were also concerned with the lack of job opportunities due to downsizing and the locality's overall economic condition.

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; use expertise of organized labor*
- *Market system to employers; offer tax incentives*
- *Better training of students to meet higher criteria of employers*

The group identified "getting all players together" as its top strategy, using the expertise of organized labor to help develop a successful system. Marietta participants also suggested a strategy of marketing the system to employers with individual meetings and tax incentives. The third most frequently cited strategy was to implement better student training to meet the higher criteria of employers.

Toledo

The following groups met in Toledo on June 14, 1994:

- Business
- Community leaders
- Educators
- Labor
- Parents

The greatest need cited in Toledo was that students lack the basic skills they need to function in the workplace. A close second was the need for cooperation between business, schools and labor. The third most frequently cited need was for teachers to be more familiar with business and to keep up with technology.

The most popular strategy was to establish communication among groups and identify current programs at local, state and federal levels. A specific suggestion called for "a professional coordinator to link all interests." While not cited as a need, the second most popular strategy was to create economic incentives, such as tax credits and repayment of liability insurance, for businesses. Third was to help educators understand "what the real job market is."

Challenges

- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Educators need to be more attuned to needs of the workplace*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; establish coordinator*
- *Create incentives for businesses to become involved*
- *Help educators understand the workplace*

Wilmington

The following groups met in Wilmington on June 22, 1994:

- Business/labor (met together)
- Community leaders/parents
- Educators

The top challenge noted was the need to share information among groups and to make "better use of communications to promote effective use of facilities, funding, personnel and present/existing programs." The second greatest need was to increase understanding of the workplace ethic among students, followed by a need to better train teachers and to update technology in the schools.

The top strategy was to provide for "collaboration among business, education and community" and to assess all existing and proposed programs. The second strategy was to provide "advanced training for teachers and support staff" and to require an internship in business for teacher certification and recertification. Third was to ensure students have basic skills before entering the workplace.

Challenges

- *Need for collaboration among groups*
- *Students lack basic skills and work ethic*
- *Need to train teachers and update technology in the schools*

Strategies

- *Involve all groups in working together; assess existing programs*
- *Advanced training for teachers; require business internships*
- *Ensure students have basic skills before entering workplace*

Programs and Groups Most Affected

When asked to identify specific programs and groups most affected by the School-to-Work system, respondents most frequently cited the following:

- Partnership programs
- Vocational and career education programs
- Workplace training programs
- Job-placement programs
- Key constituent organizations

Partnership programs most commonly mentioned were local Business Advisory Councils, apprenticeship programs, tech prep programs and other cooperative education programs. As might be expected, vocational education programs and career education services in general were frequently cited.

Job-training and job-placement initiatives thought to be most affected included PIC (Private Industry Councils), the "Jobs: Ohio's Future" and "Jobs for Ohio's Graduates" programs, and JTP Ohio (Job Training Partnership Ohio).

Constituent groups most frequently cited as being impacted by the School-to-Work system were Business Advisory Councils, local Chambers of Commerce, labor unions, professional and trade associations, and PTA/PTO groups.

When responses to this question are analyzed by audience group, certain somewhat predictable patterns emerge. Business and labor emphasized partnerships and workplace training programs. Civic leaders' responses indicated a more global perspective and stressed the impact on schools, local Chambers, and various employment and human services programs. Parents focused on the impact on job training and career education programs. Educators' responses, perhaps reflecting their central role, were the most wide-ranging; they included references to school programs, community groups, business and labor organizations and programs, and civic and legislative concerns.